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VIRGINIA HEALTH DEPARTMENT ISSUES FISH ADVISORY IN JAMES RIVER

(Richmond, Va.)—Virginia's State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H., issued a fish consumption advisory today for two species of fish in a portion of the James River expanding south from Richmond.

"The advisory is being issued due to recent tests that showed polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in blue catfish and carp exceeding the health department's level of concern," Dr. Stroube said. "Other fish species sampled did not have contaminants above our level of concern."

The advisory area covers a 43-mile stretch of the James River beginning at the Interstate 95 James River Bridge crossing in Richmond. The advisory extends south to Flowerdew Hundred where the power lines cross the river about seven miles downstream of the Benjamin Harrison Bridge.

The advisory recommends that people do not eat any blue catfish and only two meals per month of carp from the described area. Women who are pregnant or may become pregnant, nursing mothers and young children should not eat carp or blue catfish from these waters. This section of the river is already under a fish eating advisory for Kepone contamination for people who eat fish from these waters on a daily basis.

"Following the advice of this advisory will protect people who eat fish caught in these waters from adverse health effects from PCBs," said Director of Health Hazards Control Khizar Wasti, Ph.D. Long-term consumption of fish contaminated with high levels of PCBs may increase the lifetime risk of cancer.

PCBs are a group of man-made industrial chemicals that exist as a mixture and may contain up to 209 individual compounds. Since 1977, PCBs have not been produced in the U.S., but they are still found in the environment. PCBs were once widely used as coolants and lubricants in transformers, capacitors and other electrical equipment.

The VDH recommends the following precautions to reduce any potential harmful effects from eating fish:

- Eat the smaller, younger fish (within the legal limits). Younger fish are less likely to contain harmful levels of contaminants than larger, older fish.
- Remove the skin, the fat from the belly and top, and internal organs before cooking the fish.
- Bake, broil or grill on an open rack to allow fats to drain away from the meat.
- Discard the fats that cook out of the fish.
- Avoid or reduce the amount of fish drippings or broth that are used to flavor the meal.
- Eat less deep fried fish, since frying seals contaminants into the fatty tissue.

The Virginia Department of Health issues fish advisories based on the evaluation of fish tissue sample results provided by the state's Department of Environmental Quality. For more information on current fish advisories in Virginia, log onto the Virginia Department of Health's Web site on fishing advisories at www.vdh.state.va.us/HHControl/fishing_advisories.htm